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RASHĪD AL-DĪN AND THE FRANKS

by

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“From the first millennium of Islam”, remarks Professor Lewis in an article devoted to Mas‘ūdī’s list of Frankish kings,¹ “only three works appear to have survived that offer to the Muslim reader some account of the history of Western Europe”. The first of these works was Mas‘ūdī’s list, extracted from a book which he had found in Egypt in 947. The third was a Turkish translation of a French history of France, completed in 1572. The second was Rashīd al-Dīn’s *History of the Franks*, compiled c. 1306 at the behest of the Il-Khan Öljeitü. The purpose of the present paper is to show that even the author of the *Jāmi‘ al-Tawārīkh*, “the first universal history of Orient and Occident”,² was by no means immune from those feelings of “indifference, caused by a sense of superiority and contempt, which the Muslims always showed, except for a few occasions, for the western world”.³

Chinese history, it should be noted, is fully integrated into Rashīd al-Dīn’s work. In the sections on Genghis Khan and on his successors, the Great Khans, the narrative is interrupted at regular intervals to give the names of the contemporary Chinese (both Chin and Sung) and Muslim rulers with some account of events within the latter’s territories. In the case of the Chinese, it is true, Rashīd usually supplies only the regnal dates; but on his first mention of them under the years 547/1152–3–562/1166–7⁴ he gives a brief

¹ Bernard Lewis, “Mas‘ūdī on the Kings of the Franks” in *Al-Mas‘ūdī Millenary Commemoration Volume* ed. S. Maqbul Ahmad and A. Rahman (Aligarh, 1960), pp. 7–10 (p. 10). Cf. his paper “The Use by Muslim Historians of non-Muslim Sources” in *Historians of the Middle East* ed. Bernard Lewis and P. M. Holt (London, 1962), pp. 180–191 (pp. 183–184).

² Karl Jahn, *Rashīd al-Dīn’s History of India* (The Hague, 1965), p. x.

³ Francesco Gabrieli, “The Arabic Historiography of the Crusades” in *Historians of the Middle East*, pp. 98–107 (p. 98).

⁴ *Sbornik letopisei*, I/2, transl. O. I. Smirnova (Moscow-Leningrad, 1952), pp. 76–78.

sketch of the overthrow of the Liao by the Chin and both here and elsewhere⁵ refers the reader for further details to his *History of China*. There are no comparable references to the *History of the Franks*, no mention of contemporary popes or emperors, while such accounts as he gives of the activities of the Crusaders, e. g. the sack of Constantinople, in no way differ from the earlier narratives of Ibn al-Athīr and Barhebraeus, upon which they are presumably based. Clearly the *History of the Franks*, unlike the *History of China*, was attached to the main history as an afterthought and stands in no sort of organic relationship to the work as a whole.

In fact, except in the *History of the Franks*, references to Europe and Europeans are practically non-existent. One would expect, in the section devoted to the Il-Khans of Persia, to find some mention of relations with the Crusaders as also of the various missions to the European courts. To the Crusaders there is apparently only one somewhat enigmatic allusion. The participation of Bohemond VI of Antioch in Hülegü's invasion of Syria⁶ is passed over in total silence; so too is the benevolent neutrality of the Franks of Acre⁷ which facilitated the Mamlūk victory at 'Ain Jālūt; and while referring to Sultan Ashraf's capture of Qal'at al-Rūm on the Euphrates,⁸ Rashīd al-Dīn makes no mention of his earlier victories which had swept away the last vestiges of the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem. The single reference to the Crusaders is curious in the extreme. At or near Hamadan in the spring of 1257 Hülegü is joined by Baiju Noyan, the successor of Chormaghun as Mongol commander in the West, whom he upbraids, most unjustly it would appear, for his lack of activity since his predecessor's death. Baiju succeeds in allaying the Il-Khan's anger, and Hülegü dismisses him with the charge: "Thou must go and free those countries down to the shores of the Mediterranean from the hands of the children of افرینس Iفرنس and لنگتار Lankitār". Baiju then takes his leave in order to return to Asia Minor and defeat Sultan Kai-Khusrau II in the Battle of Köse-Dagh, which in actual fact had been fought 14 years before, in 1243.⁹ افرینس Iفرنس is translated by Arends¹⁰ as "the Franks",

⁵ *Djami el-Tévarikh* ed. E. Blochet, pp. 26, 446 and 498.

⁶ René Grousset, *Histoire des Croisades et du Royaume franc de Jérusalem*, III (Paris, 1936), p. 581.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, pp. 600–603.

⁸ *Dzhami-at-Tavarikh* ed. A. A. Alizade (Baku, 1957), p. 238.

⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 39. Elsewhere (*Djami et-Tévarikh*, ed. Blochet, pp. 547–548) Rashīd al-Dīn reports the Battle of Köse-Dagh under the years 658/1259–60–

while he leaves a blank for لَنكَتَار Lankitār, of which the meaning evidently defeated him. There can however be no doubt that افرينس Ifrins is France and that لَنكَتَار Lankitār is either a corrupt form or a variant of اَنكَتَار Ankitār, i. e. Angleterre.¹¹ Who, then, were “the children of France and England”? The expression is perhaps a vague term for the Crusaders in general, with whom Hülegü can in 1257 have had no quarrel. Conceivably we have to do with an anachronistic reflection of the displeasure felt by the Il-Khan at the behaviour of the Franks of Acre in 1260. In any case this is the one and only reference to the Crusaders in the whole section on the Il-Khans from the first Syrian campaign down to the death of Ghazan.

The missions to the princes of Europe began in the reign of Abaqa (1265–1282) and continued at frequent intervals throughout the whole Il-Khanid period.¹² Of these missions Rashīd al-Dīn says not a word, though he must have been aware that they were taking place; no doubt he wished to conceal the fact that a good Muslim such as Ghazan was contemplating an alliance with Christians against fellow-Muslims. His silence with respect to one such mission must almost certainly be deliberate. In a letter to the pope (then Boniface VIII) dated the 12th April, 1302, from a place with the Turkish na-

693/1293–4. It is possible that he confuses it with the Battle of Aq-Sarāi fought on the 14th October, 1256, but even so the reference is anachronistic. See H. W. Duda, *Die Seltshukengeschichte des Ibn Bibi* (Copenhagen, 1959), pp. 227 and 335. Elsewhere again, in his section on the Besüt (on the spelling of the name, which appears in Alizade's text as يِسُوت and in Khetagurov's translation as Yisut, see Pelliot-Hambis, *Histoire des campagnes de Gengis Khan*, p. 156), Rashīd al-Dīn says of this commander: “Baiju subjugated Rūm and boasted about it and gloried in it, saying: ‘It was I who subjugated Rūm’. Hülegü Khan sent for him and, having convicted him, put him to death and seized a full half of his property”. See *Dzhāmi' at-Tavārikh*, I/1, ed. A. A. Alizade (Moscow, 1965), p. 561, *Sbornik letopisei*, I/1, transl. L. A. Khetagurov (Moscow-Leningrad, 1952), pp. 195–196.

¹⁰ *Dzhāmi' at-Tavārikh* transl. A. K. Arends (Baku, 1957), p. 31.

¹¹ In a letter dated the 11th February, 1963, Professor Lewis writes: “The Arab historians of the Crusades (as distinct from the geographers of that time) very rarely mention England. The Crusaders are simply ‘the Franks’ and few bother to make any distinction between them. The only point at which England received separate mention is during the Crusade of Richard Coeur de Lion. In the histories of that period England is usually called اَنكَتَار or اَنكَتَار”.

The L- of Lankitār is probably the definite article.

¹² On the Il-Khans' diplomatic relations with the West see Jean Richard, “Le Début des relations entre la papauté et les Mongols de Perse”, *JA* (1949), pp. 291–297, Luciano Petech, “Les Marchands italiens dans l'empire mongol”, *ibid.* (1962), pp. 549–574.

me of Qush-Qapugh ("Bird Gate") Ghazan refers to a plan for a joint invasion of Syria and calls upon Boniface and the Christian princes to "prepare your troops, send word to the rulers of the various nations and not fail to keep the rendezvous".¹³ It is thanks to Rashīd al-Dīn that we are able to identify Qush-Qapugh. It was the name that Ghazan had given to the coastal strip on the western shores of the Caspian stretching northwards up to Barmakī (the present-day Divichi) – an appropriate name for the narrow corridor along which the migrant birds fly northwards from their resting-place in the Gulf of Kirov.¹⁴ Rashīd al-Dīn gives a detailed account of Ghazan's movements both before and after his entering this area, and it is reasonable to suppose that he was actually present in the Il-Khan's suite. It is difficult therefore to believe that the bearers of Ghazan's letter could have started on their journey without his knowledge or that he had no inkling of their destination. Curiously enough, the ambassadors on this occasion bore good Muslim names: Sa'd al-Dīn, Sinān al-Dīn and Shams al-Dīn. The Genoese Buscarello Ghisolfi, who at the end of 1300 or a little later had brought a message from Boniface and had taken back Ghazan's reply, was evidently not present in Qush-Qapugh, but he seems to have joined the mission at a later stage, for we find him in London at the beginning of 1303, delivering a copy of Ghazan's letter to Edward I.¹⁵ Buscarello, the Mūskeril or Bisqarun of the Mongols, has been described as "the central figure in the tableau of diplomatic relations between the Il-Khans and the West".¹⁶ He is completely ignored by Rashīd al-Dīn, who must have been aware of his existence and may even have met him personally.

Rashīd might have been expected to mention an Italian name infinitely better known to posterity than that of Buscarello. The sojourn and activities of the Polos in China have received no mention in the Chinese sources. This silence is no doubt partly to be explained by Marco's having exaggerated the extent and importance of their achievements. Thus it can be shown to be chronologically

¹³ Antoine Mostaert and F. W. Cleaves, "Trois documents mongols des Archives secrètes vaticanes", *HJAS*, 15/3–4, pp. 419–506 (p. 471).

¹⁴ See J. A. Boyle, "Ghazan's letter to Boniface VIII: where was it written?" in *Proceedings of the XXVII International Congress of Orientalists* (Ann Arbor, 1970), also *Cambridge History of Iran*, V (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 390–391.

¹⁵ See Petech, *op. cit.*, p. 564.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 562.

impossible for them to have been present at the siege of Siangyang (1268–1273), in which Marco claims that they played so prominent a role, and Marco himself, far from being governor of Yangchow, seems only to have held a post in the local salt administration. One wonders whether the Persian authorities, unlike the Chinese, may have made some reference to the Polos' presence amongst them. Their journey eastwards in the 1270's would naturally have attracted little attention, but their arrival in 1293 as envoys of the Great Khan and escorts of a Mongol princess cannot, one should think, have gone unrecorded. Rashīd al-Dīn does in fact allude briefly to their mission. Rebuffed by his uncle, the Il-Khan Geikhatu (1291–1295), Ghazan was returning to Khurāsān in the spring or early summer of 1293. At Abhar he was joined by

“Khwāja and the group of ambassadors whom Arghun Khan had sent to the Qa'an to fetch one of the kinswomen of Bulughan the Elder¹⁷ and set her in her place. They had brought Kōkechin Khatun with other Khitayan and Chinese presents worthy of kings. Ghazan halted there and married Kōkechin, and after consummating the marriage he sent a tiger and several other things from amongst the presents to Geikhatu, and set out for Damāvand”.¹⁸

It is the name Khwāja that provides the link between the two apparently contradictory accounts of the mission. Neither Jahn or Alizade appears to have taken it for a proper name, for they do not include it in their indexes, and Arends¹⁹ actually translates it by *chinovnik* “official, functionary”. Now Khwāja (or Coja, as he calls him) was according to Polo²⁰ one of the three ambassadors dispatched by Arghun to the Great Khan, the names of the other two being Ulatai (Oulatai)²¹ and Abushqa (Apusca),²² and Polo²³ expressly

¹⁷ The wife of Abaqa and Arghun, so called to distinguish her from another Bulughan married successively to Arghun, Geikhatu and Ghazan. There were actually three princesses of this name (Polo's Bolgana). See Paul Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo*, I (Paris, 1959), p. 98.

¹⁸ *Geschichte Gāzān-Hān's* ed. Karl Jahn (London, 1940), p. 40, *Dzhami-at-Tavarikh*, III, ed. A. A. Alizade, p. 280.

¹⁹ *Dzhami-at-Tavarikh*, III, transl. A. K. Arends, p. 157.

²⁰ *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*. transl. and ed. Sir Henry Yule, 3rd ed., I (London, 1903), p. 32; *The Travels of Marco Polo* ed. L. F. Benedetto, transl. Aldo Ricci (London, 1931), p. 15.

²¹ See Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo*, II (Paris, 1963), pp. 798–799.

²² *Idem*, *Notes on Marco Polo*, I, p. 44.

²³ Ed. Yule, p. 38, note 5, ed. Benedetto, p. 17.

states that Khwāja (Coja) was the only one of the three to survive the long sea voyage from China to the Persian Gulf. Khwāja's companions must therefore have been the envoys, not of Arghun, but of Qubilai: they were, presumably, Niccolò, Maffeo and Marco Polo.

It is difficult to believe that during their subsequent nine-month residence in Tabriz the identity of the Great Khan's Frankish ambassadors should not have become generally known. The fact remains that Rashīd al-Dīn, if he mentions the Polos at all, confuses them with the deceased envoys of Arghun, whilst at the same time being sufficiently acquainted with the circumstances of the embassy to report a detail unrecorded by Polo, viz. that the Great Khan's presents to his great-nephew²⁴ had included a tiger! His silence with respect to the Venetians must be attributed no doubt to the same motives which account also for the omission of the popes and emperors (Byzantine as well as Roman!) from his lists of contemporary rulers; for the paucity of his information on the Crusaders; and for his suppression of all reference to the long-drawn-out negotiations between the Il-Khans and the princes of Christendom for a military alliance against the Mamlūks. To admit that Rashīd al-Dīn fails, in this one respect, to rise above the prejudices of his contemporaries²⁵ is in no way to detract from the value and significance of the *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh* as the first world history in the full sense. On the rise and growth of the Mongol Empire it remains incomparably our richest and most authoritative source.

²⁴ The presents, like the bride, were of course intended for Arghun.

²⁵ Christian, of course, as well as Muslim. As Lewis remarks ("The Use by Muslim Historians of non-Muslim Sources", p. 180): . . . "it is no accident that while William of Tyre's history of the Crusaders in the East – the *Historia rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum* – was widely read and even translated into French, his *Gesta orientalium principum* has not, as far as is known, survived in a single manuscript".